DOES PRIVATE TUITION FACILITATE LEARNING? A STUDY AMONG CHILDREN ENROLLED IN GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Dr. Tanmoy Kumar Pal[1] & Dr. Subhrangsu Santra[2*]

[1]Assistant Registrar, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, India; Email: to.tanmoy@ gmail.com
[2]Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension, Visva-Bharati, India; Email: subhrangsu.santra@visva-bharati.ac.in

Corresponding Author

Abstract

The phenomenon of shadow education or private tuition has become an important part of students' lives in India. This trend is not limited to secondary education but has also expanded to primary school levels, highlighting its growing demand. The current paper aims to understand the attitude of parents of children enrolled in rural primary schools, and to understand how private tuition influences the level of learning of primary school-going children. The data used in this paper were collected from parents and primary-school-going children living in two (2) districts of West Bengal in India. Standardized learning assessment tools were used to assess the level of English and Arithmetic learning. Jonckheere - Terpstra Test for Ordered Alternatives were conducted to test hypotheses regarding the relation of private tuition and learning levels of students in each subject. Many parents pointed out that private tuition has become unavoidable because schools were 'inadequate'. The reasons cited by parents were rather connected to the socio-economic condition of the households. Based on the results of the statistical tests, it seemed that private tuition improved the English reading abilities of the children to some extent only but failed to improve the Arithmetic ability of the children. Qualitative discussions with children and parents revealed that parents were of the view that their children needed to be kept 'under pressure' and 'regular practice'. Private tutors kept the students under pressure to memorize the letters, words, and texts by repeated practice. The strategy of memorisation was fruitful in recognising letters and words which were indicators of language reading ability, but memorisation was not a good strategy for improving Arithmetical ability. This could be a reason behind not finding any association between private tuition and Arithmetical ability.

Keywords— *"English reading ability", "Arithmetical ability" "Private tuition" "Primary education" "Jonckheere - Terpstra Test for Ordered Alternatives"*

I. INTRODUCTION

"My son goes to private tutor".
"A tutor comes to our house for our daughter".
"He comes to our house for my son".
"My daughter also goes for tuition".

One after one, four women, all of whom were being interviewed by the researchers in a group, confirmed that they send their children to private tutors. Apart from being residents of the same village (named Ajabnagar in Hugli district of West Bengal), these respondents shared some other interesting characteristics. First, all of them were mothers of primary school-going children located in rural areas of West Bengal. Second, all the women studied at least up to Class X.

In the academic literature, private tuition is also known as 'private supplementary tutoring' and 'shadow education. UNESCO's International Institute of Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP) endorsed a simple definition (originally proposed by Bray in 1999) of private supplementary tutoring which goes like this: *"Supplementary tutoring is defined as tutoring in academic subjects (such as language and mathematics) provided by tutors for financial gain and additional to the provision of mainstream schooling".* UNESCO-IIEP observes that private tutoring takes place usually outside school hours, often in separate premises. It excludes tutoring in extracurricular subjects and voluntary help (UNESCO - IIEP, n.d.). In some countries or places, phenomenon of shadow education or private tuition has become an industry itself diminishing the school education system that it originally mimicked. In some countries like Japan, Greece and Russia, the incidences of private tuition could be traced even centuries ago (Zhang & Bray, 2020).

Private supplementary tutoring is not a new phenomenon in India. References of private tutoring in stories and biographical accounts of writers could be traced back to pre-independence times, although it was not always clear whether such references of tutoring indicated supplementary tutoring or home-schooling. In a study based on a nationally representative 'Participation and Expenditure in Education' surveys, it has been shown that a significant proportion of students at each stage of schooling took private tuition even in 1986 -87. It was found that the demand for private tutoring was inelastic at different stages of schooling. These findings indicated that private tutoring was considered by a section of Indians a necessary good in the household consumption basket. Students from urban areas, from better economic backgrounds, and male students were more likely to take private tutoring (Azam, 2016).

Researchers of Pratichi India Trust observed that the biggest sufferers of the private tuition system are children from economically and socially disadvantaged classes. Notwithstanding its varied and often dubious quality, private tuition was seen by the parents to impart a certain quality to their children's education. Most private tutors in the rural areas of West Bengal were unemployed youths whose teaching methods were opposite to those practiced in the schools. Hence, in many instances private tuition became counterproductive (Pratichi Institute & Shiksha Alochona, 2018).

According to aacademic literature and shreds of grey evidence, demand and supply of private tuition have experienced substantial growth in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka during the period 2014-2019. The demand for private schooling and tutoring was based on parents' interest in seeking a competitive advantage and perceptions about quality (Joshi, 2020). In another study conducted in Malda district of West Bengal, women Self-Help-Group members reported that they would hire private tutors for their children once their income increases (Pal & Santra, 2018). It has been recognized that there is a dearth of conclusive evidence about the effects of learning outcomes of private supplementary tutoring. The main challenge in estimating such an effect is that the decision of the parents to resort to private tutoring for a child is correlated with many unobserved variables which are also correlated with learning outcomes. Utilizing data collected through a large household survey in rural India and employing Fixed Effect (FE) estimation to control for the effect of unobserved variables, a group of researchers found a positive and significant effect of private tutoring on learning outcomes for students enrolled at Class I –VIII. This effect was equivalent to an additional year of schooling. The effect was also equivalent to studying in a private school instead of a government school. It was also found that the effect was stronger for children from poor backgrounds and children of relatively less-educated parents. The effects of private tuition were also stronger for students enrolled in government schools compared to the students enrolled in private schools (Dongre & Tewary, 2014).

Using data from the Annual Status of Education Report(s) of India and Pakistan, a study demonstrated that the socio-economic conditions of the family and the sex of the children were important determinants of the type of school they attended, school attendance of the children, and whether they are learning. Although private tuition improved learning for all children, it could not resolve socio-economic and gender disparities (Alcott & Rose, 2015). Drawing on existing research and longitudinal data sets of an NGO-run programme in Andhra Pradesh, it was found that growing numbers of parents are opting against free government provision by sending their children to low fee private schools and taking help of private tuition. However private provisioning is not currently accessible to the poorest and thus potentially deleterious to equity both within schools and within families (Singh & Bangay, 2014).

Qualitative researchers, in a study done in West Bengal of India, pointed out that a substantial proportion of private tuition emanate from and are fostered by school systems. Theoretically, private tuition as a form of privatization gave parents freedom of choice, but on a tactical level, it limited choice for the parents. School-bred tuition thus was not just a neutral shadow, but it affected the body that it imitated (Ghosh & Bray, 2020).

With this background, the current paper aims to fulfil the following research objectives:

a) To understand the attitude of parents regarding private tuition at the primary level.
b) To understand how private tuition influence the level of learning of primary school-going children.

II. METHODS

A. Study Area and Sampling

The data used in this paper were collected from one hundred (100) households living in eight villages of two districts of West Bengal. The state of West Bengal is located in the eastern part of India. The selected districts were Hugli and Uttar Dinajpur. A list of students studying in Class III and Class IV were prepared from the attendance register of the concerned class from the schools located in the selected villages. From the merged list of the students, 25 students were selected randomly from each of the sample blocks. Thus, a total of 100 households were selected from four (4) sample blocks of two districts. It was found that there were two such households where two children from each of the two households were studying in Class III or IV. In other words, in these 100 households, there were total 102 children who were studying in Class III or IV. Hence 100 parents and 102 children were interviewed as respondents.

B. Tool of Data Collection

Four types of tools were used for collecting primary data. The first tool was a semi-structured interview schedule which was used to collect primary data from parents of the children. The other tools were standardized learning assessment tools which were used for the preparation of the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASERs). These tools were developed and standardized over the years by PRATHAM, an internationally reputed organisation. The same tool was used to assess the level of English learning among students studying in Class III and Class IV and with slight modifications to assess the level of Arithmetical learning. Although PRATHAM adopted the practice of assessing the students' learning level in their mother tongue, we restricted our study to the assessment of English and Arithmetic only.

C. Variables for Statistical Analysis

Learning level depends on various factors. Private tuition was selected as the *independent variable* (IV) as it could influence the learning process and learning outcome of children. We treated English Learning Ability & Arithmetical Ability as the *dependent variables*.

Based on preliminary analysis, it was assumed that the children, who received private tuition, would have higher levels of ability than the children who did not receive private tuition. To test this assumption, private tuition was transformed into an ordinal variable. Independent Samples Jonckheere Terpstra Test for Ordered Alternatives were conducted to test hypotheses regarding the relation of each combination of independent and dependent variables. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used for statistical analysis. For conducting Independent Samples Jonckheere Terpstra Test for Ordered Alternatives (JT Test), students receiving private tuition were indicated as of higher order in SPSS, and the students who did not receive private tuition were considered as of lower order in SPSS.

III. FINDINGS

A. Socio-economic Condition of Sample Households

A break-up of occupational details of main earners and housing condition of families is given in Table 1. Though the sample households were not predominantly dependent on any sector, almost forty (40.0%) per cent of main earners worked in the agriculture sector. Only one per cent (1.0 %) of main earners were engaged in government service. The rest of the main earners were engaged in different non-agricultural activities. Data on types of living houses are also shown in Table 1, which shows that more than half of the population lived in brick or concrete houses although most of these houses were very small in size. Table 2 shows data on the educational status of family members. The data shows that in the majority (55.0 %) of the households, the member having the highest educational qualification did not even study beyond Class VIII. In addition to such poor educational status, children's mothers in 37.0 % of households did not attend formal schools.

TABLE 1: OCCUPATION AND HOUSING CONDITION

Category of Indicators	**Percent of Parents (N=100)**
Occupation of the Main Earner	
Agricultural Labour	11.0
Non-agricultural daily labour	28.0
Cultivation	19.0
Artisan / Skilled Professional	7.0
Jewellery Sector Labour	11.0
Labour in Transport Sector	11.0
Service	1.0
Shop / Business/Petty Trading	12.0
Housing Materials	
Kutcha	32.0
Mixed	17.0
Pucca	51.0

TABLE 2: EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

Category of Indicators	Per cent of Parents (N=100)
Highest Education Status in the Family	
Class I-V	19.0
Class VI-VIII	36.0
Class IX-X	35.0
Class XI-XII	5.0
Graduation or above	5.0
Educational Status of Mothers	
No Schooling	37.0
Class I-V	20.0
Class VI-VIII	30.0
Class IX-X	13.0

Data shown in Table 1 and Table 2 indicates that the sample households were not very poor although there were variations in terms of economic condition. However, in terms of educational status, the condition of households was quite poor. Such poor educational conditions indicated that the parents would not be in a position to guide their children at home regarding their studies.

B. Opinion of Parents about Private Tuition

The parents were asked about the necessity of private tuition (see Table 3). Out of 100 parents, most of them (86.0 %) thought that private tuition had already become unavoidable, and schools were not enough to ensure learning among children. Few of them (11.0%) thought that private tuition should not be encouraged because the practice of private tuition does not help poor families.

TABLE 3: OPINION OF PARENTS ABOUT PRIVATE SUPPLEMENTARY TUITION

Opinion about private supplementary tuition	No. of Parents (N=100)
Private tuition is unavoidable	86 (86.0)
Private tuition should not be encouraged	11 (11.0)
Not sure	3 (3.0)
Total	**100 (100.0)**

It was found that out of 102 students, 60 students (i.e. 58.8 %) were taking help for Arithmetic and English from private tutors. In most cases, the private tutors taught most of the children at their homes. Some of the children were taught in a small group of two or three by a tutor although such a system could not be termed as an organised form of coaching centres. Such group-based tuitions were given in one of the houses where children lived while other children living nearby came to that house to attend the tuition. The tutors were young college graduates from the village itself except in one case. In a village in Uttar Dinajpur, a parent reported that the private tutor used to teach as a teacher in another Government school. Various reasons were cited by the 60 parents who took the help of private tutors for taking such help. The reasons are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: REASONS CITED BY PARENTS FOR TAKING HELP OF PRIVATE TUTORS

Reasons Cited	No. of Parents (N=60) *
Improving knowledge of the child	36 (60.0)
Disciplining the child and developing a habit of study	20 (33.3)
No one to guide at home	11 (18.3)
Parents lack time to provide guidance	6 (10.0)
Improving the result in the examination	9 (15.0)
School teachers are not seriously teaching	5 (8.3)
Total	60 (100.0) *

(No. of parents are in each row are not mutually exclusive as many parents cited multiple reason.)*

The reason cited by most of the parents (60.0 %) was ‘improving the knowledge of the child’. It was also observed that the reasons cited repeatedly by parents were rather connected to the socio-economic condition of the household. For example, the second most important reason was disciplining the child and developing a habit of the study. This reason was cited by 33.3 per cent of parents. Indeed, many of the mothers complained that they could not control their children, and their children did not listen to their instructions. Mothers felt that their scolding or occasional physical punishment was not effective to develop a habit of study among children. Hence, they had to take the help of tutors for their children. Similarly, the lower level of educational status of parents (as shown in Table 2) constrained their ability to guide the children. Hence it was natural for 18.3 % of parents to point out that there was no one to guide their children at home. Interestingly, although many parents pointed out that private tuition has become unavoidable because schools were 'inadequate', only 5 parents out of 60 parents pointed at the lack of seriousness of the teachers.

C. English Learning Level

The distribution of the students having different English ability levels is shown in Table 5. There were two categories of children: those who took private tuition and those who did not. The overall deficit in English reading and comprehension skills was evident from the data. Out of 102 students, only 22.5 per cent of students were able to read simple sentences written in English. On the other hand, 11.8 per cent of students could not even recognize capital letters properly. This implied that class III & IV students might not have received a similar type of learning inputs in the school or their home.

TABLE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS HAVING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ENGLISH READING ABILITY

English Reading Ability Level	Per Cent of Students (N=102)		
	Taking Private Tuition (N=60)	Not Taking Private Tuition (N=42)	Total (N=102)
1 (Not even capital letter)	10.0	14.3	11.8
2 (Capital letter)	18.3	33.3	24.5
3 (Small letter)	13.3	16.7	14.7
4 (Word)	26.7	26.2	26.5
5 (Simple Sentence)	31.7	9.5	22.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Among the students who took private tuition, 31.7 per cent could read simple English sentences, but 10.0 per cent could not even recognise English capital letters. Among the students who did not take private tuition, these figures were 9.5 per cent and 14.3 per cent respectively. Apparently, private tuition seemed to help students in improving their English reading ability.

D. Arithmetical Ability

The level(s) of Arithmetical ability of the children has been shown in Table 6. Assessment of Arithmetical ability revealed that, out of 102 students, only 25.5 per cent of students were able to divide. Among the rest, 32.4 per cent could perform subtraction and 21.6 per cent could perform addition. However, there were 20.6 per cent of students who could recognize numbers but could not perform any arithmetical operation.

TABLE 6: ARITHMETICAL ABILITY vis-à-vis PRIVATE TUITION

Arithmetical Ability Level	Per cent of Students (N=102)		
	Taking Private Tuition (N=60)	Not Taking Private Tuition (N=42)	Total (N=102)
1 (Not Even Numbers)	0.0	0.0	0.0
2 (Recognise Numbers)	18.3	23.8	20.6
3 (Addition)	21.7	21.4	21.6
4 (Subtraction)	33.3	31.0	32.4
5 (Division)	26.7	23.8	25.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

The results of the assessment showed that children in the study area lacked foundational skills in Arithmetic. Since they were Class III and Class IV students, it was clear that the skill gaps were not addressed properly in the earlier Classes even though they remained more than two years in the schools. There was not much difference between the students who took private tuition and those who did not. The maximum difference was found at the lowest of arithmetic skills, i.e., the ability to recognise numbers. Among the students who took private tuition, 18.3 per cent could just recognise numbers but lacked any other skill numeric skill. This figure was 23.8 per cent among the students who did not take private tuition.

E. Testing of hypotheses

Based upon the descriptive findings presented above, null hypotheses were formed by treating 'private tuition' as the independent variable and treating 'English Learning Ability' & 'Arithmetical Ability as dependent variables. The results of the Jonckheere-Terpstra test(s) are summarized and displayed in Table 7.

TABLE 7: JONCKHEERE-TERPSTRA TEST SUMMARY

Description			English Reading Ability	Arithmetical Ability
Number of Levels in Category of Students [a]			2	2
N			102	102
Observed J-T Statistic			1629.0	1345.5
Mean J-T Statistic			1260.0	1260.0
Std. Deviation of J-T Statistic			143.4	141.9
Std. J-T Statistic			2.6	.603
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			**.010**	**.547**
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig.		.009[b]	.546[b]
	95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.007	.536
		Upper Bound	.011	.556
Monte Carlo Sig. (1-tailed)	**Sig.**		**.004[b]**	**.271[b]**
	95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.003	.262
		Upper Bound	.005	.280

a. Grouping Variable: Category of Students (Taking Private Tuition=1, Not Taking Private Tuition =0)
b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 508741944.

For English Reading Ability, the null hypothesis that 'the distribution of ENGLISH READING ABILITY is the same across categories of STUDENTS TAKING PRIVATE TUITION' was rejected. As the 2-tailed p-value for English Reading Ability (0.004) was less than the significance level of 0.05, it was concluded that the English reading ability of the children would probably be higher if the child took private tuition. For Arithmetical ability, however, the p-value was 0.547 which was higher than the significance level of 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis that the distribution of ARITHMETICAL ABILITY is the same across categories of STUDENTS TAKING PRIVATE TUITION' was accepted. The result indicated that there was not much difference between the two groups of students in terms of their arithmetical ability. In other words, Arithmetical ability of the children was not influenced by private tuition.

III. DISCUSSION

During interaction, it was reported by the respondents that it was a common practice for parents to seek the help of private tutors to teach their children English as it was a foreign language. They also took the help of private tutors for Arithmetic as they understood that Arithmetical skills would be needed throughout the life of their children. But based on the results of the statistical test, it seemed that private tuition improved the English reading abilities of the children to some extent only but failed to improve the Arithmetic ability of the children. Based upon field level qualitative discussion with the parents and the children, two interesting observations are forwarded to explain the opposing impact of private tuition on two subjects.

It was reported by the parents in the study area that their children needed to be kept 'under pressure' and 'regular practice'. The parents tended to think that the children would not remember anything if they were not forced to study on regular basis. Discussions with children revealed that private tutors kept the students under pressure to memorize the letters, words, and texts by repeated practice. This type of strategy was fruitful in recognising letters and words which were indicators of language reading ability. This mechanism seemed to be an important factor behind finding a statistically significant relationship between the practice of private tuition and English reading ability.

But memorisation is not a good strategy for improving Arithmetical ability. Improving the ability of Arithmetic would need explaining the concept and helping the students to discover logical relationships involved in arithmetical operations. Regular study under the vigil of a private tutor would not automatically ensure such discovery by a student. This could be a reason behind not finding any association between private tuition and Arithmetical ability. It was also found that, in some households, family members like father, uncle, elder brother and elder guided the children in Arithmetic. In one of the households in Hugli district, the mother of a child said proudly made this remark: "His father could not study much. But he can do mental calculations very fast. He could not sit in Class X Examination. But he knows much more than private tutors. *(Or baba porasona hoyto besi dur korte pare ni, kintu jekono hisab mukhe mukhe kore dite paren. Uni Class X er poriksha te boste pare ni, kintu uni onek private tution master der theke bhalo poriye debe.*)" Parents in such families also guided their children in Arithmetic instead of depending on a private tutor which also reduced the difference between the arithmetical ability of students.

IV. CONCLUSION

Quality education has functions of empowerment of the individual, catalysis of economic growth & ignition of social change. Recognizing the significance of quality education, the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has accepted the ground reality about the learning gap among Indian school students. The NEP 2020 aims to have an education system by 2040 that is second to no other country. Achieving such a goal would require understanding the reasons for the learning gap among students and taking steps to address those gaps properly.

This paper has highlighted that parent's resort to the assistance of private tutors when they sense the ineffectiveness of the schools to provide education to their children. parents of the study area were no exception. Statistical tests revealed that private tuition was effective in improving the English learning level of children, but did not make any difference in

Arithmetical learning level. But qualitative discussions with parents and children indicated that private tuition itself added little value to the learning of children.

However, resorting to private tuition can only be a band-aid-like partial solution for an ailment that is rooted in social structure and the system. On the one hand, parents lacked the capacity to guide their wards due to their poor educational status. On the other, the school system promoted the children to the next higher classes without ensuring the basic language skills and Arithmetic skills. It is imperative for the state apparatus to come forward, recognise the systemic lacuna in schooling practice and make the system work so that children learn. Without it, the dreams enshrined in NEP would remain only in letters.

REFERENCES

1. Alcott, B., & Rose, P. (2015). Schools and learning in rural India and Pakistan: Who goes where, and how much are they learning? *Prospects*, *45*(3), 345–363. doi: 10.1007/s11125-015-9350-5
2. Azam, M. (2016). Private Tutoring: Evidence from India. *Review of Development Economics*, *20*(4), 739–761. doi: 10.1111/rode.12196
3. Dongre, A. & Tewary, V. (2014). Impact of Private Tutoring on Learning Levels: Evidence from India. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi: 10.2139/ssrn.2401475
4. Ghosh, P., & Bray, M. (2020). School systems as breeding grounds for shadow education: Factors contributing to private supplementary tutoring in West Bengal, India. *European Journal of Education*, *55*(3), 342–360. doi: 10.1111/ejed.12412
5. Joshi, P. (2020). Private Schooling and Tutoring at Scale in South Asia. In P. M. Sarangapani & R. Pappu (Eds.), Handbook of Education Systems in South Asia (pp. 1–20). Singapore: Springer Singapore. doi: 10.1007/978-981-13-3309-5_23-1
6. Pal, T. K., & Santra, S. (2018). Impact Of Women Cooperatives on Women Empowerment &Primary Education Among Muslims: A Case Study in West Bengal. In G. Saha, S. K. Pal, P. Saha, K. Ghosh, & Atanu Kumar Sinha (Eds.), Vision of Rabindranath Tagore on Co-operative Society and Community Development (pp. 128–137). Kolkata: Aaheli Publishers.
7. Pratichi Institute & Shiksha Alochona. (2018). *Primary Education in West Bengal: The Scope for Change (pp. 66-67)*. Kolkata: Pratichi India Trust.
8. Singh, R., & Bangay, C. (2014). Low fee private schooling in India – More questions than answers? Observations from the Young Lives longitudinal research in Andhra Pradesh. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *39*, 132–140. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.08.004
9. UNESCO - IIEP. (n.d.). Private Tutoring. In Learning Portal - Glossary. UNESCO - International Institute for Educational Planning. Retrieved from https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/glossary/p
10. Zhang, W., & Bray, M. (2020). Comparative research on shadow education: Achievements, challenges, and the agenda ahead. *European Journal of Education*, *55*(3), 322–341. doi: 10.1111/ejed.12413.